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## THE BURIAL AND RESURRECTION OF BLACK HAWK.<sup>1</sup>

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Dr. J. F. Snyder.

An interesting instance of the persistence of pristine mortuary customs of the Indians was observed, in 1870, by the writer, in the former territory of the Osages near the Arkansas river, above Wichita. At the head of a small grave mound in one of their old cemeteries was still standing the remnant of a thick walnut board, rotted and broken by long exposure to the weather, on which were many strange figures deeply carved, and the whole surface painted in blue, red, and green colors, yet but little faded. The grave was but three feet deep, and contained the much decayed skeleton of a young girl, buried there probably fifty years before. On the wrists and ankles were brass rings, and around the neck a necklace of glass beads of various colors, among which were strung three U. S. Army brass buttons and a U. S. Army belt buckle. At one side of the skull was a white granite-ware tea cup, in which were a few bird bones and other fragments of the food it originally contained, covered over with a large mussel shell. At the other side of the head was an ordinary glass bottle, no doubt filled with water when placed there. Here were presented all the conditions of the earliest Indian burials; the tea cup and glass bottle substituted for similar ancient vessels of clay pottery, and the glass beads and brass ornaments in

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is a modified and corrected reproduction of "The Burial of Black Hawk" I wrote for the Magazine of American History in May, 1886. J. F. S.

place of those wrought by their remote ancestors from bone, shell, and native copper.

In the burial of Black Hawk, by his band, could be discerned traces of analogous ancestral customs.

An eminent American ethnologist, in the course of a public lecture, in 1881, to support his contention that many of our Indian tribes continued, until a late period, the erection of sepulchral mounds over the remains of their distinguished dead, stated that Black Hawk's kinsmen, "after having deposited the body of their venerated chief in a grave six feet deep, heaped over it a great mound of earth several feet in height."

Inquiring of the lecturer his sources of information for this interesting fact—that the Sacs and Foxes were mound builders as late as 1838—he referred me to Henry R. Schoolcraft, LL. D., who, half a century ago, was our highest authority on matters pertaining to the North American Indians, and who, a few years before, compiled for the government six ponderous quarto volumes, profusely illustrated, entitled, "The History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States." The author of that great work was one of the few men of education who, at that period, had devoted much time to the personal observation and study of Indian customs and character. Dr. Schoolcraft passed thirty years of his life among our Indian tribes, and his wife was the granddaughter of an Indian chief. He visited almost every tribe living between the eastern seaboard and the Rocky Mountains; consequently the accounts he gave of them, in his many publications, were, in his time, regarded as exhaustive and thoroughly reliable.

The career of Black Hawk is familiar to all readers of western history. For some time he was a prominent figure in the affairs of this State, and caused our struggling settlers much trouble and many hardships, which, however, were in a measure compensated by the glory he unwittingly shed upon the administration of

Governor Reynolds. His contest with the young chief, Keokuk, for supremacy in his tribe, and of his gallant, but hopeless efforts to regain the homes and graves of his ancestors, are now a fading page of history, and he is known chiefly as merely the instigator of a petty hostile incursion of a wretched band of his followers on our unprotected frontier border. Yet, as late as 1886, many of our citizens then living had seen him, and some of them personally knew him well. Intelligent white men then resided near the spot where he died, and were cognizant of every detail of his burial. Considering these facts, it seems strange that the particulars of his death and burial should have been unknown to Mr. Schoolcraft, when he could so easily have obtained correct information of every circumstance attending the event. But he disposes of the famous warrior's last days and final interment in the following brief terms (Vol. VI, p. 454): "He was safely conducted to his home on the distant Mississippi, where he lived many years, a wiser and a better man. After his death his tribesmen gave to his remains those rites of sepulture which are only bestowed upon the most distinguished men. They buried him in war dress, in sitting posture, on an eminence and covered him with a mound of earth." No dates are given; nor is the location of his "home on the distant Mississippi" indicated; nor is there any mention of ceremonies at his grave, or any fact stated by which the magnitude of the "mound of earth" covering him can be estimated.

One of the several biographies of Black Hawk that had appeared prior to that of Frank E. Stevens, in 1903,<sup>2</sup> was that of Benjamin Drake, published in Cincinnati in 1848. The account given of the noted warrior's burial in this little volume was communicated to Mr. Drake by Col. Charles C. Whittlesey, the eminent scientist of Cleveland, Ohio, who, a few years before, when engaged in

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<sup>2</sup> *The Black Hawk War, including a review of Black Hawk's Life.* By Frank E. Stevens, Chicago, 1903.

the geological exploration of Wisconsin Territory, had journeyed "to the far west, about the mouth of the DesMoines river," and had learned from settlers in that distant wilderness these facts related by Mr. Drake, on page 246, as follows: "After his death he was dressed in the uniform presented to him by the President, or Secretary of War, and placed upon a rude bier, consisting of two poles with bark laid across, on which he was carried by four or five of his braves to the place of interment, followed by his family and about fifty of his tribe (the chiefs being all absent). \* \* \* The grave was six feet deep and of the usual length, situated upon a little eminence about fifty yards from his wigwam. The body was placed in the middle of the grave in a sitting posture, upon a seat constructed for the purpose. On his left side the cane given him by Mr. Henry Clay was placed upright, with his right hand resting upon it. Many of the old warrior's trophies were placed in the grave, and some Indian garments, together with his favorite weapons. The grave was then covered with plank, and a mound of earth, several feet in height, was then thrown over it, and the whole enclosed in pickets twelve feet high. At the head of the grave a flagstaff was placed bearing our national banner, and at the foot there stands a post on which is inscribed in Indian characters his age."

Until 1863 this account was copied in our histories as authentic, and comprised all that to that time had been published relating to the disposition of Black Hawk's remains.

It is generally known that when he returned from Washington and his tour of the eastern cities, in 1837, Black Hawk settled, with a remnant of his band of Sacs and Foxes, including his relatives and personal adherents, on the reservation set apart for them by the government, by previous treaty, on the DesMoines river in the (then) Territory of Iowa; and the old warrior's cabin

and village were situated on the north bank of that stream, near the present town of Iowaville, in the northeastern corner of Davis county. He died there, at the age of seventy-two, of bilious fever, on the third day of October, 1838, while nearly all of his people were gone to Rock Island to meet the United States Commissioners for the adjustment of certain claims.<sup>3</sup> He had been failing physically for some time, and was too feeble to bear the fatigue of the journey to Fort Armstrong on that occasion. His last illness was of two weeks' duration. No white person witnessed his death, as he was attended only by his wife and family, and the medicine man of his band.

My investigations to ascertain to what extent, in this particular instance, the Sacs and Foxes adhered to their ancestral custom of mound building, resulted in securing from living witnesses accurate details of Black Hawk's burial, as well as reliable information of the resurrection of his remains and their accidental cremation. In the different accounts received, slight discrepancies occur, but they generally agree in the leading incidents closing the history of the old warrior's eventful life. Capt. Jas. H. Jordan was a trader among the Sacs and Foxes before Black Hawk's death, was present at his burial, and when I wrote, was still residing on the very spot where he died. To my inquiries he answered as follows:

"Eldon, Io., July 15, 1881.

Black Hawk was buried on the N. E. qr. of the S. E. qr. of Sec. 2, township 70, range 12, Davis county, Iowa, near the northeastern corner of the county, on the Des Moines River bottom, about ninety rods from where he lived at the time he died, on the north side of the river. I have the ground where he lived for a door yard, it being between my house and the river. The only mound over the

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<sup>3</sup> As-shaw-equa, (Singing bird), widow of Black Hawk, died at the Sac reservation, on the Kansas river, on the 29th of August, 1846, at the age of 85 years.

grave was some puncheons split out and set over his grave and then sodded over with blue grass, making a ridge about four feet high. A flag-staff, some 20 feet high, was planted at his head, on which was a silk flag, which hung there until the wind wore it out. My house and his were only about four rods apart when he died. He was sick only about fourteen days. He was buried right where he sat the year before, when in council with Iowa Indians, and was buried in a suit of military clothes, made to order and given to him when in Washington City by Gen. Jackson, with hat, sword, gold epaulets, &c. &c."

From another old settler of that locality, Mr. Isaac Nelson, the following was received:

"Hickory, Io., June 24, 1881.

I came to Iowa in the spring of 1836, and was two or three times near Black Hawk's house, but never went in to see him. \* \* \* He was buried in a manner on the top of the ground, but his feet were about sixteen inches in the ground and his head about a foot above the surface. He had on a suit of military clothes; four new nice blankets were wrapped around him, a pillow of feathers was under his head, a plug hat was on his head, and an old-fashioned brussel stock around his neck. You may ask how I saw all of this when he was in his grave. I will try to describe the way in which he was buried, and then you will understand it. A forked post had been planted at his head, and one at his feet; a ridge pole was laid in these forks, and then puncheons put over him in the shape of a roof, and the earth thrown on, which made a rise of two or three feet above him. The whites had taken out the two ends so we could see through. The grave had been enclosed with pickets some eight feet high, planted in the ground with joints broken; but these the whites had forced apart so that we could easily creep in. His feet were to the east, and his head to the west. At his feet was a shaved oak post with painting on it, and at his head a pole with a nice silk flag. All the grass and weeds were kept out of the enclosure, and for some

distance around the outside. He had no coffin, but was laid full length on a board with four fine blankets around him."

In the *Annals of Iowa* (1863, p. 50; and 1864, pp.353 *et seq.*), Willard Barrows, Esq., and Capt. H. B. Horn also state that Black Hawk's body was laid on a board which was sunk at the foot or lower end, about fifteen inches below the surface of the ground, while the other, or upper end of the board was raised, and supported three feet above it; thus his body reclined at an angle with the horizon of some twenty-five or thirty degrees. "He was dressed in the military uniform of a colonel of the regular army, said to have been presented to him by a member of President Jackson's cabinet, with a cap on his head elaborately ornamented in Indian style with feathers. At his left side was a sword, which had been presented to him by Gen. Jackson; and at his right side were placed two canes, one of which he had received from Hon. Henry Clay, the other was the gift of an officer of the British army. Besides these were deposited on either side other presents and trophies, highly prized by him as mementos of his valor and greatness. About his neck were ribbons suspending three medals, one the gift of President Jackson, another was presented to him by ex-President John Quincy Adams, and the third by the city of Boston. The body was enclosed with boards resting on end on either side, and meeting on a ridge-pole fixed on forked posts set in the ground at the head and feet, forming a roof with an open space below. The gables of this rude vault were closed with boards, and the whole was covered with earth, and then sodded over. At the head was a flag-staff thirty-five feet high, which bore an American flag worn out by exposure, and near by was the usual hewn post inscribed with Indian characters, representing his deeds of bravery, and record as a warrior. Enclosing all was a strong circular picket fence twelve feet high."



His body remained there until July, 1839, when it was resurrected, and carried off, by one Doctor Turner, who then lived at Lexington, Van Buren county, Iowa. Capt. Horn says that Dr. Turner subsequently took the denuded skeleton of the defunct warrior to Alton, Illinois, for the purpose of having the bones articulated with wire. Mr. Barrows says the skeleton was sent to Warsaw, Illinois.

The sons of Black Hawk were very indignant when they heard of the desecration of their father's grave, and complained of it to Governor Lucas, at that time the Governor of Iowa Territory, and his Excellency at once caused the bones to be brought to Burlington, the Territorial capital, and held securely for their proper custodians. But when the young Black Hawks came to take possession of the osseous remains of their illustrious sire, it seems that finding them safely stored "in a good, dry place," they concluded to leave them there. A year or two later the skeleton was deposited in the collection of the Burlington Geological and Historical Society, and there is no doubt was destroyed by the great fire that, in 1855, swept away the building and all it contained of the Society's collections. However, the editor of the *Annals of Iowa*, (April, 1865, p. 478), said there were good reasons to believe that the bones were not lost in the burning of the museum, and he was "credibly informed they were then at the residence of a former officer of the Society, and thus escaped that catastrophe."

Dr. J. H. Rauch, the first Secretary of the Illinois State Board of Health, was, at the time of said catastrophe, secretary of the Burlington Geological and Historical Society, and stated to the writer that when the historic skeleton was returned to the territorial capital, by order of the executive, it was placed in the care of Dr. Enos Lowe, who deposited it in the Society's museum after Black Hawk's sons, and all of his band, had removed to the far west. It was possible, Dr. Rauch intimated, that Dr. Lowe may have taken the skeleton with

him when, a few years later, he moved from Burlington to Omaha, Nebraska.

Dr. Lowe's son, Gen. W. W. Lowe,, was then still a resident of Omaha, and to him I addressed certain interrogatories which he promptly answered as follows, under date of November 29, 1881:

"After Black Hawk's grave had been rifled, and his bones had been recovered, the tribe (Sacs and Foxes) requested my father to take possession of them, and he did so, wiring them, and keeping the skeleton in his office, where, for a long time they continued to come to view it. Subsequently, with the consent of the tribe, he presented it to the Geological and Historical Society of Burlington, and there the remains were destroyed by the burning of their building in 1855."

This is conclusive that said remains of the old warrior were finally consumed by fire; and this closing act, though unaccompanied by the savage wailings of his people, was altogether in harmony with his restless, turbulent life.

The old belief that the mound builders were a distinct race inhabiting this country before the Indians, and superior to them in physical and mental culture, has long ago been proven a fallacy. America was peopled, from the Arctic zone to Tierra del Fuego, by but one race, the red American Indians, and those observed here by the first Europeans—and their descendents to a later date—were the mound builders. But although the mound building custom had become obsolete among all North American Indians long before 1838, many of them still retained ideas and traditions of the primitive method of their ancestors in the inhumation of their dead. Thus, in the burial of Black Hawk by his kinsmen, can be seen a curious vestige of mound interment practiced in prehistoric ages by their earliest ancestry.

As then, the warrior's dead body, arrayed in his best raiment and trappings, surrounded by his arms, orna-

ments, and the trophies he most highly prized in life, was placed on the surface of the ground as nearly as practicable in the sitting posture. In this instance the ridge pole and puncheons covering—borrowed from encroaching pioneer civilization—were substituted, as protection of the corpse from ravages of wild beasts, for the rude stone wall, or crib work of cedar logs, of former times, and the four fine blankets did service in place of the dressed deer skins and buffalo robes, with bark covering, of the long ago. And over all was raised the rudimentary mound of earth and sod, which only lacked the addition of earth contributed by each individual of the tribe at its annual visits to the sepulcher, to swell it, in a few years, to a monument in proportions worthy of the rank, ability and achievements of the distinguished dead.